HWS45
.S017

Report

SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION

The Library

of the

University of Wisconsin

REPORT

PRESENTED BY THE

SOCIAL - DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION

TO THE

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST WORKERS' CONGRESS.

HELD AT ZURICH,

AUGUST 6th to 12th, 1893.

LONDON:
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY PRESS, Ltd.,
37A, CLERKENWELL GREEN, E.C.

HX545
.D17

761006

REPORT PRESENTED BY THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION TO THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST WORKERS' CONGRESS.

The two years which have elapsed since the International Congress at Brussels have witnessed an advance of Socialism in England of which the progress of Socialist organisations is a very insufficient criterion. Owing to the peculiar constitution of English society, and the different methods adopted at the present time by the governing classes of this country from those which obtain on the Continent, the consolidation of a Socialist party, as distinguished from all other parties, is much more difficult than from the freedom of public discussion, alike in the press, on the platform, and in the street, would seem possible. It may be said, indeed, that the very liberty of discussion which is now permitted in all parts of Great Britain tends to shade away the antagonism which is necessary in order to give thoroughness to a Socialist Party. Although the endeavour to maintain the right of public meeting at the street corners and in the public parks has led to the fining and imprisoning of many members of the Social-Democratic Federation in London, and a few in the country, the policy of the governing classes towards Socialism and its advocates in England is much more dexterous than that pursued in France, Germany, Austria, Belgium, and elsewhere. Instead of putting men in gaol for their opinions, and thus making martyrs of them, the leaders of the political parties in Great Britain endeavour to take such palliatives from the Socialists as may serve to temporarily cripple their agitation, and strive also—unfortunately not altogether without success—to tempt away from Socialist organisations their most active propagandists. At the same time the growth of what is called the New Trade Unionism diverted from the active advocacy of Socialism many well meaning men and women who thought that they saw in the organisation of unskilled labour upon the old trade union lines a short cut to the goal of the emancipation of the proletariat. This New Trade Unionism, though to a certain extent imbued with Socialist doctrines, has so far failed to advance the cause of militant Social-Democracy in Great Britain. It would be scarcely too much to say, that, by confusing the issues and by leading the workers to suppose that mere organisation under wagedom might gain them considerable advantages, it did—in spite of the excellent intentions of its leaders—for a time head back the Social-Democratic advance. But for the solid nucleus of Socialists which has been formed by the assiduous work of the past twelve or thirteen years the New Trade

Unionism of 1889-93 would end much as the agricultural labourers movement under Joseph Arch ended.

Meanwhile the influence of Socialism upon the public mind at large has been very marked. Not only in political circles but in commercial and financial quarters the ideas of Socialism are now discussed as worthy of consideration. Even the vocabulary of Socialists can be traced in the utterances of many public men who certainly have no sympathy whatsoever with the views of our party. The correspondence and even the articles in the capitalist press show that Socialist sympathiers are becoming sufficiently numerous for the editors of journals to pad their advertisements with matter which Socialists themselves may be induced to read. The Church of England parsons and the Non-conformist Ministers frequently endeavour to prove that all that is good in Socialism, as well as the enthusiasm and self-sacrifice which they cannot deny to its advocates, are really due to the influence of Christianity and to the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Such attempts to turn to the advantage of the prevailing creed the truths of scientific Socialism are at any rate a confession of the progress we are making among the mass of the people. Some parsons and divines go still farther than this, and one eminent churchman, the Bishop of Durham, going beyond even the teaching of Catholics of the type of Bishop Ketteler and the Comte de Mun, openly declared in two successive yearly addresses to his clergy that capitalist production was by no means the last word in the history of human civilization.

Economic forces are helping on the recognition of the fact that, whether Socialism is the solution of the present pressing problems of modern society or not, the capitalist system is rapidly breaking down in the departments of high finance and international commerce. London, still the centre of world-wide capitalism, has not only not recovered from the crisis of 1890, but the three years which have since elapsed have now resulted in even a more widespread and ruinous crisis than that which was connected with the name of the Barings. In every department initiative has ceased, and the incapacity of the ablest brains of the financial and mercantile classes to handle the powers of modern society to the advantage of the community—either in an old country like England, or in the United States of America, the Argentine Republic or the colonies of Australasia—is becoming daily more apparent; whilst the failure of banks and the collapse of industry have had terrible effect. The condition of agriculture throughout Great Britain is even more serious than it is in other European countries. The recruiting ground for our great cities is now so restricted that it may be said no longer to exist, while the deterioration of the physique of the working people in those cities is so marked that more than ever do they require the influx of fresh blood from the country to keep up the standard of strength necessary even for the success of capitalist exploitation. There is a growing feeling at the present time among the more intelligent and sympathetic of the dominant classes in favour of measures which may check the physical, moral, and mental degradation of the people. Though this is more theoretical than practical there can be little doubt that

even their pious opinions will tend to weaken their opposition to change in the near future.

The so-called Municipal Socialism, which so far does not extend beyond the absorption of the supply of gas, water, tramways, &c., by municipal bodies, and the securing to their employees that ill-defined remuneration for their services called "trade union rates of wages," has made a certain amount of progress ; and in London the County Council has provided an organisation which, under a wider election and with better educated councillors, may possibly break down that permanent antagonism between great towns and the country which Municipal Socialism, as at present advocated by Radicals, Progressives, Fabians, and others, does but serve to perpetuate and crystallise. Nothing short of the combination of collective ownership of land, factories, and mines in which city and country shall be inextricably blended, can possibly obviate the dangers which arise out of mere municipal improvements that do not look to the speedy redistribution of the people over the entire surface of the country.

Since the Brussels Congress of 1891, the Social-Democratic Federation has made most satisfactory progress as an organisation. During the past two years five new sections or branches have been formed in London, and twenty-five in the provinces. On the other hand, seven sections have from various causes fallen through. But the members of those branches have not been lost to the organisation as the great majority of them have joined other branches.

In 1891-2 the S.D.F. had a long and weary struggle with the police concerning the holding of meetings at a place called World's End, in Chelsea, a district in the south-western portion of London. The police prohibited the meetings, but members of the S.D.F. continued Sunday after Sunday in their attempt to hold meetings at this spot, until after six months struggle in the street and in the police courts we were victorious, and open-air meetings are held there by our Chelsea branch to this day. Altogether twenty-six members were arrested, most of whom were condemned to various terms of imprisonment and fines, or to find sureties. There is little doubt that, had not this question been fought out by the steady enthusiasm of our members, open-air Socialist meetings would have been put down in other parts of the metropolis.

Unfortunately this struggle for Free Speech occurred just at the time of the London School Board and County Council elections, and prevented as much work being devoted to our candidatures for these bodies as would otherwise have been done. But the polls of our candidates Shallard in Greenwich (10,109) and Rogers in West Lambeth (11,993) were eminently satisfactory, both candidates coming within a few hundred votes of being elected. The Socialist vote in West Lambeth showed an increase of 3,577 on that of 1888. Good polls were also obtained for the Social-Democratic candidates in other constituencies.

The County Council or municipal elections for London followed close

upon the School Board elections, which was a decided disadvantage to us. But our candidates polled a considerable number of votes more than in 1886, John Ward in Wandsworth polling 2,724 as against 969 given to Richmond in 1886. The voting for the London County Council is on an entirely different basis to that of the London School Board.

Want of funds prevented the S.D.F. running candidates for the General Election last year as had been decided upon. Only two went to the poll, viz., H. R. Taylor in London and W. K. Hall at South Salford (Manchester). The small number of votes polled by Taylor is an evidence of the hold which party feeling still has on the majority of the working classes ; and the absence of a second ballot in English elections permits of no voting for principle at the first ballot. The votes polled by W. K. Hall in South Salford were 553. His chances of being elected were spoiled by the introduction into the contest of an official Liberal after Hall had been put forward. The action of the Liberals on this occasion shows how well they act up to their professions of sympathies with "Labour Candidates." It is gratifying therefore to know that the Liberal candidate failed to gain the seat.

The fact of there being no second ballot in English elections, as on the Continent, militates greatly against the recording of a genuine Social-Democratic vote. As we said before, its absence permits of no voting for principle on the first ballot. It is not anticipated that an avowed Social-Democratic candidate will at first be successful in any constituency for either parliamentary or municipal elections. This fact is taken advantage of by Liberals and Radicals to urge the workers to concentrate their votes on the Liberal or Radical candidate, who professes to be in favour of certain reforms which he never means to propose or see carried out, but against which the Conservative candidate may have declared. Hence the workers will often vote for a Liberal candidate, although they would prefer a Socialist, because they fear to "throw away" their votes, as it is termed, on a candidate whose principles are known to be sound, but whose chances of success are uncertain.

At the last provincial School Board elections Shufflebotham retained his seat on the Bolton School Board, and Snow his seat on the Tottenham School Board. In both these cases there was a good increase in the Socialist vote. Johnson was also elected on the Nelson School Board. Our comrades in other provincial towns have frequently put forward candidates for various local elections who have polled from about 100 to 800 or more votes.

Last April thirty-two members of the S.D.F., who were run as candidates for the Poor Law Guardians in London and suburbs, polled altogether 25,683 votes. Two of them were elected. The Guardians' Elections have different voting and districts to those of both the London School Board and County Council, and all have a kind of property qualification.

Last year the S.D.F. took advantage of the return of a Liberal Government to power to reassert the right of public open-air meetings in Trafalgar Square out of which the people were driven by the police and military on November

13th, 1887. The S.D.F. invited the co-operation of other bodies, and although the Radicals seemed at first inclined not to press for the opening of the Square, which they had loudly demanded while their political opponents were in office, they ultimately joined with us. On the 13th of November, 1892, five years after the Square had been closed, it was reopened by a great and successful public meeting in which Socialism was well represented by our numerous red banners and flags, and at which the majority of the speakers were members of the S.D.F.

It is also a proof of the growing importance of Socialism in this country that our comrades H. M. Hyndman and H. Quelch were called upon to give evidence before the Royal Labour Commission.

During the last two years the S.D.F. has been able to send comrades on propagandist tours through various parts of the provinces. The districts to which these visits have been made are Lancashire, Northumberland and Durham, South Wales, Yorkshire, the Midlands and Scotland. The results of these visits, especially in Lancashire, Scotland, and the Midlands have been most satisfactory. The Lancashire District Council of the S.D.F., which comprises a Federation of twenty sections, supports W. K. Hall as organiser, and A. G. Wolfe is being sent into various districts by the General Council.

We must not omit to mention that we have now a Socialist printing press established, and by that means we have been able to double the size and circulation of our weekly organ JUSTICE, which is now in the tenth year of its existence. We also do a great deal of Socialist and trade union printing.

In the past six months our membership has so increased and our finances have so improved that we feel we are at last reaping some of the fruits of the twelve years' hard and continuous work of Socialist propaganda which we have carried on against the ignorance and apathy of the British workers. We are the more justified in believing this to be the case, for of late there has been no "boom" of any description to the Socialist movement, though, of course, the regular work of agitation and organisation have continued without interruption.

It is only right to claim here before this International Congress on behalf of the Social-Democratic Federation that, though our numbers have never been so large as we could wish, we have never at any time retained in our body any man or woman who subordinated the cause to his or her personal advancement or private gain. From first to last the S.D.F. has steadily maintained the purity of its principles, and the disinterestedness of its actions. We cannot doubt that in the stirring times close ahead of us the full effect of this incorruptible determination will make itself felt, though it may, in the future as in the past, occasionally cause us to lose the services of able self-seekers.

At present the S.D.F. is carrying on about 130 propagandist meetings per week in London and the provinces, irrespective of branch, business, committee, and other meetings. Between now, therefore, and the holding

of the next International Workers' Congress, we look forward to such a spread of Socialist principles and such a growth in our organisation throughout Great Britain as will encourage our comrades in other countries just as every success which they achieve puts fresh hope and enthusiasm into us.

We are, in fact, in a period of transition which may be traced in every department, and it is the more encouraging that during the period when indifference and apathy might well discourage Socialists to find that our organisation, which has steadily refused to compromise or in any way lower the principles of revolutionary International Socialism, is now making way more rapidly than any other throughout the length and breadth of Great Britain. The Social-Democratic Federation, which has now outlived alike the detraction of enemies and the half-hearted support of doubtful friends, forms at the present time a centre in nearly every great city around which the working classes can rally in the period of serious difficulty which we have now entered upon. Even in Australia, where the economic conditions have lately become most disastrous to the mass of the workers, thorough-going Social-Democrats educated in our ranks have succeeded in impressing an ever-increasing number of workers with the fact that through Social-Democracy alone can they hope for final emancipation.

The English-speaking people throughout the British Empire are in fact slowly learning that not in any spread-eaglism or spurious sentimentality is there hope for the future. That the development of economic forms renders Socialism inevitable, makes Social-Democrats more earnest and enthusiastic in their endeavour to convince their countrymen that the time being ripe for the crucial change only education and organisation are needed among the producers of all nations to bring about a complete and conscious social revolution. Of late, in Great Britain, the degradation of middle-class Parliamentarian, contemporaneously with the decay of similar institutions in the United States, and in France, has hastened on the acceptance of the Social-Democratic solution of existing difficulties. When, therefore, a general movement is decided upon to seize the means and instruments of production from the incompetent hands of the plundering class, we have no longer any doubt that the great majority of the inhabitants of our island will range themselves by the side of our comrades on the continent of Europe in the most glorious struggle that the world has ever seen.

THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF THE
SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION,
H. W. LEE, *Secretary.*

89097489066

b89097489066a

GAYLAMOUNT
PAMPHLET BINDER
~
Manufactured by
GAYLORD BROS. Inc.
Syracuse, N.Y.
Stockton, Calif.

B89097489066
B89097489066A